WISDOM AND WIT

OF THE TALMUD

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WISDOM AND WIT OF THE TALMUD

(Compiled for The Talmud Society, Boston, Mass., U. S. A., by Harry Albro' Woodworth)

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He who occupies himself with the study of the Talmud, pursues a course than which there is none better.

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THE GOLDEN RULES OF THE TALMUD

Whatever would be hateful to thee, do not do to thy neighbor.

That which thou likest not being done unto thyself, do not do unto thy neighbor.

Thou shalt not leave thy neighbor to suffer any pain whatsoever, but thou shalt prevent it by supplying him with whatsoever thou canst afford.

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CHARITY AND LOVE

Almsgiving is practised by means of money, but charity also by personal services and by words of advice, sympathy and encouragement.

Almsgiving is a duty towards the rich as well as the poor, nay, even towards the dead.

He who turns away from works of love and charity turns away from God.

The works of charity have more value than sacrifice; they are equal to the performance of all religious duties.

The merit of charitable works is in proportion to the love with which they are practised.

Rather skin a carcass for pay in the public streets than lie idly dependent upon charity.

Even he who lives in charity should practise benevolence.

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DO GOOD FOR ITS OWN SAKE

Be not like the servants who serve their masters for the sake of reward.

Whatever thou doest let it be done in the name of Heaven.

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DUTY OF ACQUIRING KNOWLEDGE

Without knowledge there is no true morality and piety.

The more knowledge the more spiritual life.

Be eager to acquire knowledge; it does not come to thee by inheritance.

If thou hast acquired knowledge, what dost thou lack? But if thou lackest knowledge, what hast thou acquired?

He whose knowledge is great without its influencing his moral life is like a tree that has many branches, but few and weak roots; a storm cometh and overturneth it.

The ultimate end of all knowledge and wisdom is man's inner purification and the performance of good and noble deeds.

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CHEER

God's commandments are intended to enhance the value and enjoyment of life, but not to mar it and make it gloomy.

If thou hast the means, enjoy life's innocent pleasures.

That which beautifies life and gives it strength, such as riches and honor, is suitable to the pious, and agreeable for the world at large.

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RELIGION AND TOLERANCE

Religion is the light of the world.

Support the aged without reference to religion.

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GOD'S WILL AND MAN'S DUTY

Do God's will as thy own will; submit thy will to His will.

Be bold as a leopard, swift as a roe, and strong as a lion to do the will of thy Father who is in Heaven.

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MAN'S ACCOUNTABILITY TO GOD

Consider three things, and thou wilt never fall into sin: Remember that there is above thee an all-seeing eye, an all-hearing ear, and a record of all thy actions.

Consider three things, and thou wilt never sin: Remember whenst thou comest, whither thou goest, and before whom thou wilt have to render account for thy doings.

He who raises his hand to strike his neighbor is already considered wicked even before he has smitten him.

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FREEDOM OF WILL

Everything is foreordained by Heaven, except the fear of Heaven.

Everything is ordained by God's providence, but freedom of choice is given to man.

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LABOR

Love labor, and hate to be a lord.

Great is the dignity of labor; it honors man.

Beautiful is the intellectual occupation, if combined with some practical work.

He who does not teach his son a handicraft trade neglects his duty.

Better is he who lives on the toil of his hand than he who indulges in idle piety.

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COUNTY AND COMMUNITY

The law of the country is as sacred and as binding as God's law.

Pray for the welfare of the government; without respect for the government, men would swallow one another.

Do not isolate thyself from the community and its interests.

Those who work for the community shall do it without selfishness, but with the pure intention to promote its welfare.

Do not aspire for public office; but where there are no men try to be the man.

Blessed is he who gives from his substance to the poor; twice blessed he who accompanies the gift with kind, comforting words.

The noblest of all charities is enabling the poor to earn a livelihood.

As a garment is made up of single threads, so every single gift contributes to accomplish a great work of charity.

Do not separate thyself from society.

Man's thoughts and ways shall always be in contact and sympathy with fellow-men.

No one shall depart from the general customs and manners.

PARENTS AND CHILDREN

One child must not be preferred to the other.

It is a father's duty not only to provide for his minor children, but also to take care of their instruction, and to teach his son a trade and whatever is necessary for his future welfare.

Where children honor their parents, there God dwells, there He is honored.

THE CONJUGAL RELATION

First build a house and plant a vineyard; and then take a wife.

A man's home means his wife.

Let a man be careful to honor his wife, for he owes to her above all the blessings of his house.

Who is rich? He who has a noble wife.

A man should be careful lest he cause his wife to weep, for God counts her tears.

In in anger the one hand removed thy wife and child, let the other hand bring them back to thy heart.

Woman prefers poverty with the affection of her husband to riches without it.

Love your wife like yourself; honor her more than yourself.

An unkind wife is a mental affliction.

He who loves his wife as his own self, and honors her more than himself, and he who educates his children in the right way, to him applies the divine promise: Thou shalt know that there is peace in thy tent.

Tears are shed on God's altar for the one who forsakes the wife of his youth.

Let youth and old age not be joined in marriage, lest the purity and peace of domestic life be disturbed.

If thy wife is small bend down to her to take counsel from her.

He who lives without a wife is no perfect man.

To be unmarried is to live without blessing, without kindness, and without peace.

As soon as a man marries his sins decrease.

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JUSTICE, TRUTH AND PEACE

The world rests on three things—on Justice, on Truth, and on Peace.

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Justice

Thy neighbor's property must be as sacred to thee as thine own.

Thy neighbor's honor must be as dear to thee as thine own.

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Truth

Truth is the signet of God, the Most Holy.

Let thy yea be in truth and thy nay in truth.

Truth is heavy; therefore few carry it.

Truth lasts forever, but falsehood must vanish.

To be faithless to a given promise is as sinful as idolatry.

To break a verbal engagement, though it is not legally binding, is a moral wrong.

It is sinful to deceive any man, even is he be a heathen.

He who deceives his neighbor would also deceive his God.

Deception in words is as great a sin as deception in money matters.

When the immortal soul shall be called to account before the Divine Tribunal, the first question will be, "Hast thou been honest and faithful in all thy dealings with thy fellow-men?"

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Peacefulness

Peace is the vessel in which all God's blessings are presented to use and preserved by us.

Be a disciple of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace.

Be humble to thy superior, affable to thy inferior, and meet every man with friendliness.

He who is slow to anger, and easily pacified, is truly pious and virtuous.

Man, be ever soft and pliant like a reed, and not hard and unbending like the cedar.

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SCHOLARS AND TEACHERS

The rivalry of scholars advances science.

Four things are derogatory to scholars: To walk alone in the dark (thus arousing suspicion); to be perfumed; to be the last in entering a house of prayer: and to hold much discourse at a meeting of dunces.

There are three different kinds among scholars: One who is able to ask questions, and to answer them, is a wise one: one who is only able to ask

questions, but not to answer them, is inferior to him; but he who is able neither to ask nor answer questions, is not to be considered at all.

Who are you whose prayers alone have prevailed? I am a teacher of little children.

Do not exact pay for thy teachings; for the Omnipotent has given His teachings to thee gratuitously, for the one who asks for reward destroys the whole world; because there are many who cannot afford to pay, and will remain ignorant.

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PHYSICIANS

Wait not to honor the physician till thou fallest sick.

Medicine is a science whose practice is authorized by God himself.

We ought not to live in a town where there is no physician.

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BLESSINGS OF POVERTY

The noblest of all charities lies in enabling the poor to earn a livelihood.

Be mindful of the children of the poor, for learning comes from them.

Honor the sons of the poor; it is they who bring science into splendor.

Poverty sits as gracefully upon some people as a red saddle upon a white horse.

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ETIQUETTE

Be always pleasant at your entering and at your leaving.

Never shall a man enter the house of his neighbor without permission and this conduct learn from the Holy One, blessed be He, who stood at the gate of the garden and called to Adam (Gen. III, 9) "Where art thou?"

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BUSINESS

If certain goods sell not in one city, try another place.

Attend no auctions if thou hast no money.

Make but one sale and thou art called a merchant.

He who walks each day over his estate finds a coin daily.

Deal with those who are fortunate.

If thou hast borrowed money, know that thou hast borrowed it to be repaid in time—if thou hast loaned money to somebody, be prepared to have difficulty in collecting it.

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LIFE

Life is a passing shadow, says the Scripture. Is it the shadow of a tower or a tree? A shadow that prevails for a while? No; it is the shadow of a bird in its flight;—away flies the bird and there is neither shadow or bird.

What should man do in order to die? Give himself entirely to life.

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JUDGEMENT AND ATONEMENT

One who says, "I will sin and then do repentence", is not afforded the opportunity to repent: "I will sin and the day of Atonement will atone for it", or, "I will sin, and the day of death will wipe it out"—it does not do so.

Do not slander, for on the day of judgement the mouth will be the first to give account.

He who wishes to be forgiven, must forgive.

Your feet that have not carried you to sin, what can the Angel of Wrath do with you?

TALMUDIC TREASURE TROVE

The fortune of this world is like a wheel with two buckets; the full bucket empties and the empty fills.

The best preacher is the heart; the best teacher is time; the best book is the world; and the best friend is God.

Three names were given to man: one by his parents; another by the world; a third by his works which are written in the immortal book of his fate.

If the fox is king, bow before him.

Speech is the messenger of the heart.

If a word spoken in its time is worth one piece of money, silence in its time is worth two.

To be patient is sometimes better than to have much wealth.

Few are they who see their own faults.

A myrtle even in the desert remains a myrtle.

The cock and the owl both await daylight. "The light," says the cock, "brings me to life; but what in the world art thou waiting for?"

Iron breaks stones; fire melts iron; water extinguishes fire; the clouds consume water; the storm dispels clouds; man withstands the storm; fear conquers man; wine banishes fear; sleep overcomes wine; death is the master of sleep; but "Charity," says Solomon, "saves even from death."

Beat the gods and their priests tremble.

Thy yesterday is thy past; thy today is thy future; thy tomorrow is a secret.

He who possesses a knowledge of God and a knowledge of man will not easily commit sin.

The shepherd is lame and the goats are nimble, but at the entrance of the fold they will have to meet him and at the door of the stable they will be counted.

If the thief has no opportunity, he thinks himself honorable.

Those who when offended do not give offense, and when hearing slighting remarks do not retaliate, these are the friends of God; they shall shine forth like the sun in its glory.

Neither the security of the wicked nor the afflictions of the righteous are within the grasp of our understanding.

This world is the antechamber of the world hereafter; therefore, prepare thyself in the antechamber, that thou mayest be admitted into the banqueting hall.

Do not seek to appease thy friend in the hour of his passion; do not seek to console him when his dead is laid out before him; and do not interrogate him in the hour of his vow, and strive not to see him in the hour of his disgrace.

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"ORIENT PEARLS AT RANDOM STRUNG"

Set thyself to learn the law, for it is not an heirloom unto thee.

If I do not care for myself who will do it for me? And if I care only for myself, what am I?

The pious fool and the hypocrite are destroyers of human society.

Two pieces of coin in one bag make more noise than one hundred.

If thou tellest thy secret to three persons, ten know of it.

When love is intense both find room enough upon one board of the bench; afterwards they may find themselves cramped in a space of fifty subits.

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THE WISDOM OF THE AMORAIM

When the ox is down, many are the butchers.

The cat and the rat make peace over a carcass.

The sun will set without any assistance.

When the shepherd is angry with his flock, he appoints for their leader a blind bell-wether.

There are three crowns—of the law, the priesthood, and the kingship, but the crown of a good name is greater than them all.

Even for the rebuilding of the Temple, the instruction of the children must not be interrupted.

God looks to the heart of man, then to the mind.

Ignorance and conceit go hand in hand.

Look upon fools as empty shadows.

Alas for one thing that goes and never returns. What is it? Youth.

Dignity does not consist in a silk dress.

If it be thy wish to be kept away from sin, always look at the result of it.

Be as the lower threshold, upon which all people tread, and still it lasts even when the whole building is demolished.

Look not upon the pitcher, but upon what it contains. Many a new pitcher is full of old wine, and many a old one does not even hold new wine.

Think of a palace in the center of which the vat of a farmer is placed; so is a handsome and respected man who lets an unbecoming vow pass his lips.

Seven things mark the clod, and seven there are for the sage—The wise man does not speak before those who surpass him in wisdom and years; he does not interrupt another in his speech; he is not hasty in answering; he does not ask questions rashly, but asks them with propriety and to the point; he speaks first upon the matter first in order, and last upon the last: when he does not understand the matter under discussion, he confesses, "I do not understand it", and he admits it when he has been convinced. The opposites of these things mark the clod.

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TRENCHANT THOUGHTS OF RIGHTEOUS RABBIS

If you are questioned on the most unimportant matter and you do not know it, be not ashamed to say, "I do not know."

Do not make thy merit as a crown to be glorified by it, and not as a hatchet to cleave with it, nor a spade to dig with it.

Be afraid of a light sin, for this may bring you to a grave one.

Take care that thou shouldst not need to bow to some one on account of thine own works.

The beauty of the law is wisdom; the beauty of wisdom is modesty; the beauty of modesty is the fear of Heaven; the beauty of the fear of Heaven is noble performance; the beauty of noble performance is secrecy.

A single light answers as well for a hundred men as for one.

Let not your ears listen to vain talk, for they are most likely to get burned.

Say little "yea" and little "nay".

Your mouth that has studied the Torah will be a blessing to those who wish to be blessed.

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